



Insights into Bharat's AI Generation

India's first comprehensive study of AI adoption
among rural youth

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Foreword

As India races toward its ambition of becoming a global AI leader, the voices of its 300 million+ rural youth must not be an afterthought—they must be the starting point. This report, the first large-scale primary survey of its kind, captures how a generation standing at the threshold of adulthood is already encountering, embracing, and experimenting with Artificial Intelligence.



Conducted across small towns and semi-rural pockets in multiple states, the survey of 3,005 youth (18–29 years) reveals a striking reality: AI has crossed the novelty threshold in rural India. 91% are aware of ChatGPT, 86% have used it, and 55% use AI almost daily. For these young people—60% still students, education clustered around Class 12 and early college—AI is no longer an elite, urban technology. It has become a personal tool: a faster tutor than YouTube, a patient language coach, a confidence-building friend, and a quiet mentor where human guidance is scarce.

YouGRAF (Youth Growth, Resilience, Aspirations, and Future Readiness) is Head Held High Foundation's pioneering national index. Launched with this AI survey as its inaugural study, YouGRAF will serve as an annual, longitudinal tracker of rural and small-town youth—measuring how they navigate opportunity, technology, education, and livelihoods. It translates their lived realities into actionable insights for policymakers, skilling partners, and technology developers, ensuring that national strategies are grounded in the aspirations of Bharat's youth rather than assumptions from metros.

Foreword

This YouGRAF. JAN AI report, released at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 matters now because the window to shape inclusive AI adoption is narrow. India’s demographic dividend, digital infrastructure, and national AI missions are converging. Yet without grounded insights into how rural youth actually use AI—its gendered pathways, infrastructure barriers, fears of job loss, and aspirations for local-language, job-relevant tools—we risk repeating old divides. AI can compress learning from hours to minutes, turn “Google sirf photo dikhata hai” (“Google only shows photos”) into “AI batata hai kaise banana hai,” (“AI tells us how to create photos”) and fill the mentorship vacuum that holds back millions. Or it can remain a mirage if we fail to act. At Head Held High Foundation, we intend to put these insights to work immediately. They will inform the design of our Y youth programmes, guide the creation of AI literacy and skilling pathways, shape advocacy with policymakers, and help partners build low-data, vernacular AI tools that speak to real rural needs of our youth —studies, jobs, forms, schemes, and earning.

I am deeply grateful to the Gates Foundation, The/Nudge Foundation and GxD Hub for their support that made this work possible. My heartfelt thanks to CL Educate and MySathi for supporting us as the Education and Research Partners. Huge shoutout to Sriram and the OMRC team for the stellar execution of this in-depth survey and generating insights, and the entire Head Held High team for their passion and rigour in reaching out to the youth.

The youth in these pages are not waiting for the future—they are already building it with whatever tools reach their phones. Our responsibility is to ensure those tools are worthy of their dreams.

Madan Padaki
Managing Trustee & Co-
founder
Head Held High Foundation

The Youth We Speak Of

Background

As we start looking at how rural youth use AI, trust it, or imagine its future, it is important to understand who these youth are, where they live, what stage of life they are in, and how close they are to work. This section establishes the social and economic starting point from which AI enters their lives.

Locations	%	Age Profile	%	Gender Profile	%
Kamalapuram	9	18–21 years	51	Female	54
Muzaffarpur	8	22–25 years	38	Male	46
Udaipur	7	26–29 years	10	Other / NA	0
Warangal	6	BASE (100%)	3005	BASE	3005
Hyderabad	5	Education Profile		%	
Khamgaon	4	12th Pass / Inter / PUC		49	
Lucknow	4	Attended college, not completed		17	
Yadgiri	4	10th Pass		14	
Kadapa	4	Graduate / PG completed		12	
Gulbarga	3	School up to 10th		8	
Dhanbad	3	BASE		3005	
Durg	2	Occupation Profile		%	
Ranchi	2	Student		59	
Ahiwara	2	Unemployed / Not working		17	
Kolkata	2	Private job – monthly salary		12	
Barabanki	2	Private job – contract		4	
Sirohi	2	Own business		3	
Surat	2	Others		6	
Others	52	BASE		3005	
BASE	3005	BASE		3005	

In summary of the Youth Surveyed;

The youth sample represents a young, pre-career population concentrated in small towns and semi-rural geographies. Education is heavily clustered around Class 12 and early college, with relatively few having completed graduation.

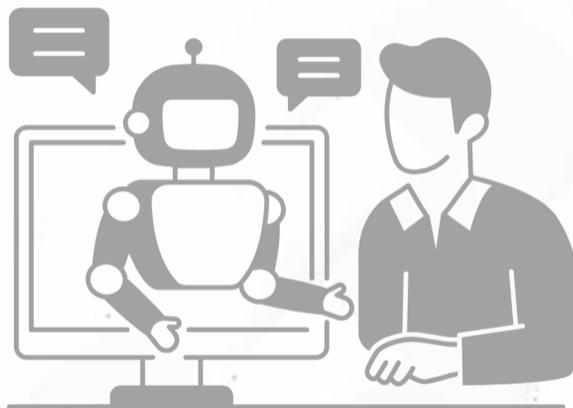
While students form 60% of the sample, nearly 20% are earning youth (16% employed, 3% self employed). It is largely a generation standing at the threshold of adulthood, educated enough to dream, but not yet educated enough to secure their future.

Is therefore, AI a bridge? Or a mirage for these youngsters?

AI Penetration

Is AI useful? Transformative?

Is AI present in the lives of rural youth



This section examines awareness, trial, and habitual use of AI, and, whether AI remains a novelty or has already become an integral part of how young people study, search, work and handle everyday life.

AI User Class	%
Regular Users	55
Light Users	28
Non-Users	17
BASE	3005

Relevance of AI	%
AI is very much meant for me	63
Meant for me to some extent	22
Maybe / not sure	11
AI is not for me	2
BASE	3005



AI has already crossed the novelty threshold among rural youth.

The distribution shows;

- A strong core of regular users
- A sizeable segment of light users
- A meaningful base of youth who have tried AI but not sustained usage

Importantly, most youth felt AI is meant for people like them. **AI has entered the psychological space of rural youth as a personal and relevant tool.**

AI Tools	Aware	Used
ChatGPT	91	86
Google Gemini / Bard	66	61
YouTube AI	55	49
Snapchat AI	47	41
Microsoft Copilot / Bing AI	39	34
Instagram AI tools	35	30
Image AI (e.g., Midjourney)	18	15
Other AI tools	7	4
Not aware of any AI tool	3	na
Have not used any AI	na	2
BASE: 3005 (ALL)		

Usage

The survey reveals that AI is not unfamiliar to rural youth. A majority report having heard of or tried at least one AI tool. However, frequency of use varies significantly.

To better understand usage intensity, we classify respondents into three groups:

Regular Users: Use AI almost daily

Light Users: Use AI weekly or monthly

Non-Users / Dormant Users: Rare, one-time, or no current use

This classification helps move beyond awareness to depth of engagement.

**This grouping is consistently used to organize youth into clear & comparable segments.*

Frequency of Usage	%
Almost daily	55
Once or twice a week	20
Once a month or less	8
Whenever I need it	11
Only tried once	4
Not using now	2
BASE	3005

This indicates that AI penetration is real — but depth varies.

AI has reached rural youth. But sustained adoption is still stratified.

What Drives Regular Use?

Responses show that regular users are more likely to use AI for;

- Finding study-related answers
- Language assistance
- Content creation
- Job preparation

The qualitative evidence revealed, for many youth, AI is experienced as “YouTube ek ghanta leta hai. AI 15 minute mein wohi cheez de deta hai.” (*YouTube takes an hour while AI gives it to me in 15 minutes.*)

Time compression — not novelty — is the first driver of repeated use.

Similarly, in work contexts, “Jo kaam pehle ek ghanta leta tha, ab 5 minute mein ho jaata hai.”

(*The task that used to take one hour now gets done in 5 minutes.*)

Regular use correlates strongly with visible efficiency gains.

AI as Search 2.0

Survey data shows that the most common uses of AI remain;

- Study help
- Finding answers
- Clarification of concepts

Qualitative interviews reinforce this pattern. “Google sirf photo dikhata hai. AI batata hai kaise banana hai.” (*Google only shows the photo whereas AI instructs us on how to make it.*)

AI is functioning as an interactive layer, humanising the google experience.

This explains why AI adoption is intuitive, many say “I don’t know much about AI,” even while using it effectively!

The Inhibition to Stretch

Despite usage, the data also reveals limitations;

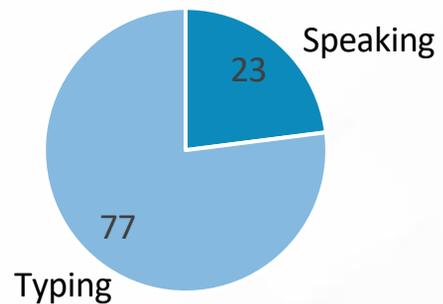
- Only a minority use AI for learning new skills
- Use for income generation remains limited
- Concerns around misuse and privacy remain present

Evidence suggests that while youth experiment confidently, their imagination of AI's possibilities is still bounded. The gap between current use and potential use becomes central to the near term AI growth story in rural India.

Behaviour

Now that we know AI has entered everyday life, the question next is how is it being used? Is AI primarily a source of entertainment? Study aid? Job helper? Or is it something else? This section looks at the tasks and purposes for which rural youth actually turn to AI, based on their self-reported usage.

AI Uses	%
Finding answers to school or college questions	63
Studying or exam practice	57
Learning or translating languages	46
Writing messages or social media posts	33
Chatting with AI like a friend	28
Making resumes / job applications	25
Finding general information	25
Editing photos or captions	23
Filling online or government forms	20
Health or medicine queries	18
Learning new skills	17
Business or earning-related work	14
BASE	3005



Depth of Engagement	%
1–2 more questions	46
3–5 more questions	33
More than 5 questions	14
Usually ask only once	5
BASE	3005

When AI is not clear	%
Ask AI again in a different way	48
Search on Google	33
Ask a friend, family or teacher	11
Ignore the answer	3
Don't know how to fix it	3
BASE	3005

AI usage has taken off, it is yet to be structured, guided, or perceived as a skill-building pathway.

Experience using AI;

Best Experiences	%
Helped me understand my studies better	35
Saved time / gave fast answers	27
Improved my English or writing	16
Helped with jobs, resumes, or forms	12
Made things easier and less stressful	7
Other (fun, curiosity, etc.)	3

Worst Experiences	%
Gave wrong or misleading answers	39
Did not understand my question	21
Language or communication problems	15
Gave shallow or incomplete answers	12
Technical or internet problems	8
Other (privacy, fear, etc.)	5

With nearly six in ten respondents being students, it is but expected that studies, exam preparation, and finding answers to school or college questions will dominate AI usage. These are the expected, low-friction entry points into AI.

The second layer of engagement — language support, writing messages, and social media content — reflects a deeper youth need not just to get by, but to measure up and step up. These uses are fundamentally about presenting oneself better, gaining confidence, and participating in a wider world that was previously distant because of communication barriers.

Similarly, chatting with AI like a friend points to another powerful opportunity. It is not only a form of emotional support, but also a gateway to mentoring, direction-setting, as rural youth lack access to reliable advisors in their immediate environment.

Usage - Deep Dive

AI Usage	Male %	Female %	Gap
Study / exam help	61	66	5
General information	27	23	-4
Language / translation	42	49	7
Writing messages / posts	30	36	6
Chatting like a friend	25	32	7
Photo / caption editing	26	20	-6
Resume / job applications	28	21	-7
Government / online forms	24	17	-7
Learning new skills	20	15	-5
Business / earning	18	11	-7

- Women lead in communicative & supportive uses. Over-index on study help, language, writing, and chatting.
- Men lead in transactional & economic uses. Over-index on job applications, forms, skills, and earning.
- The “friend” role is more important for women. Suggests AI is filling a social gap.

AI has entered youth life as a helper for what they already do, but it has not yet become a bridge to what they want to become.

Usage - Deep Dive Continued;

Stage of use	Regular	Light	Non User
Study & exam help	74%	55%	18%
Language & writing	56%	38%	12%
Social / expression (chat, posts)	41%	22%	6%
Job & form tasks	33%	19%	4%
Skill learning	28%	14%	2%
Earning / business	23%	11%	2%

*BASE: Regular ≈ 55% | Light ≈ 28% | Non-users ≈ 17% of total sample
(Non-Users include One Time Triers)

This table points to a phased AI adoption curve;

Study → Language → Communication → Jobs → Earning

Segments;

- Regular users are both heavier and deeper.
 - AI becomes Tutor, language coach, guide and partner.
- Light users are in the 'utility' mode
 - AI is more of the college + google search extension.
- Non-Users are currently excluded, more like late adopters.
 - Bare, even study question-answers are very low.

Importantly, what we observe is, **AI is not about more or less, AI is about what it means to the young.**

Summary of Findings

Youth: How Rural and Small-Town Youth Are Encountering Artificial Intelligence

This study surveyed 3,005 youth aged 18 to 29 across small towns and semi-rural geographies in multiple Indian states to understand how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is entering their lives, what they use it for, how they interact, the wows, their fears, and what they expect it to become.

The population is young and pre-career. 60% students, 20% earning (16% employed, 3% self-employed), with education clustered around Class 12 and early college and relatively fewer graduates. It is a generation educated enough to aspire, and not yet equipped enough to secure their future.



AI Has Already Entered Youth Life

AI is not a niche technology in this population. Awareness is near-universal, and 55% of youth claimed they use AI almost daily, with another 28% using it at least occasionally. Only 17% are non-users (includes some who said they have tried it once). Most youth also feel that AI is meant for people like them, with 85% saying it is either very much or somewhat meant for them.

Most importantly, 85% feel AI is meant for people like them, indicating that AI has become psychologically “owned” by rural youth rather than seen as an elite, urban technology.

AI has crossed the novelty threshold

Awareness and trial are near-universal. 91% know ChatGPT, 86% have used it. Comparable penetration exists for Gemini, Meta AI, YouTube AI, Snapchat AI, Copilot. More than half use AI almost daily, and only a small minority remain disengaged.

Intuitive discovery, the jugaad adoption

AI’s chat-based, low-friction interface aligns naturally with how rural youth experiment and improvise, a digital jugaad approach. Young people discover use-cases by trying, asking questions, re-phrasing when it does not get it right, and cross-checking on Google. This intuitive tinkering explains both the speed of adoption and the uneven depth of use.

Trust Is Functional but local fit is still fragile

Most youth feel AI understands them always or most of the time (70%), and when it fails, nearly half re-ask or rephrase their question rather than abandoning it. This shows active engagement rather than passive consumption.

At the same time, 87% report that AI often or sometimes does not fit local needs or situations. This gap between usefulness and contextual fit is one of the strongest signals in the data.

Major anxieties and concerns include;

- AI reducing job opportunities (53%)
- Personal data misuse (42%)
- AI storing everything they ask (33%)

These fears exist alongside heavy use, indicating cautious adoption rather than rejection. Youth are optimistic yet guarded in usage.

What AI is used for: the student core and the confidence layer

With nearly six in ten being students, studies, exam prep, and question-answering dominate (63%, 57%). The second layer, language, writing, and social media (46%, 33%) signals something deeper, the need to measure up and step up by improving communication, presentation, and participation in a wider world previously held at a distance by language barriers.

A striking 28% “chat with AI like a friend”, not just for information, but to fill a mentoring and guidance gap where reliable local advisors are scarce.

Yet skill learning (17%) and earning uses (14%) remain low, revealing a large headroom between what youth do today and what they hope AI can do for their futures.

Learning and Employment Expectations

Youth increasingly link AI with their futures:

- 77% believe AI can help them prepare for a job
- 71% say AI has changed the kind of job they want (?)
- 90% are interested in a government-certified AI course
- 61% believe such a course would help them get a job

At the same time, most are learning AI through YouTube and Google, not through formal institutions.

Not just the Frequency, Depth matters

Usage is not simply “more vs less”; it is what AI means. Youth negotiate AI in phases;

Study → Language → Communication → Jobs → and hopefully Skills.

- Regular users have moved, AI becomes tutor, language coach, guide, and partner.
- Light users stay in utility mode (college + Google + or Google replacement).
- Non-users are structurally excluded—even study uses are minimal.

Gendered pathways into AI

Women over-index on study, language, writing, and chatting, using AI to build confidence and expression. Men over-index on jobs, reflecting pressure towards earning. The “AI-as-friend” role is notably stronger among women, pointing to social and mentoring deficits that AI partially fills.

Infrastructure and Access

Barriers to deeper AI use are primarily structural;

- 35% don’t know how to use AI well
- 25% face language barriers
- 29% face phone or internet constraints

85% say they would use AI more if they had better devices and connectivity.



Aspirations outpace structure

77% believe AI can help prepare for jobs; 71% say it has already changed the kind of job they want; ~90% want a government-certified AI course. Yet most learning happens through YouTube and Google, not formal pathways, an aspiration-infrastructure gap.

What youth want AI to become

When asked to imagine an AI made specially for them, youth most commonly want:

- Local-language, locally relevant AI (45%)
- Help with studies (40%)
- Help with jobs and earning (32%)
- Trustworthy and accurate answers (28%)
- Low-data, low-cost operation (24%)
- Help with real-life tasks like forms, schemes, health, and farming (22%)

This is a vision of AI not as a chatbot, but as a teacher, helper, and guide embedded in everyday rural life. Filling in the role of the scarcest resource in rural parts - mentorship.

Persona Profiles

Naveen (27)	Archisman (20)	Subhasmita (22)	Swananda (23)	Kritika (25)
Male	Male	Female	Female	Female
Rampur, West Bengal	West Bengal	Bhubaneswar, Odisha	Sealdah, West Bengal	Bhubaneswar, Odisha
Task	Task	Task	Task	Task
Posters, creative scripts for client outreach	Building a functional drone (coding, electronics, assembly, debugging)	Medical studies, teaching dance, interview prep	General questions, explanations, business exploration, art space	Saree & bridal design ideation and customization
Pre-AI Reality	Pre-AI Reality	Pre-AI Reality	Pre-AI Reality	Pre-AI Reality
Canva-based; ~1 hour per poster; redesign loops if client disliked output	6+ months learning; 4–5 guides; fragmented learning across people & YouTube; slow debugging	Hesitation asking doubts; English barriers; instruction confusion	Unstructured searching; dependency on Google; uncertainty on next steps	Instagram & celebrity images used but not adaptable or customizable
Use Case	Use Case	Use Case	Use Case	Use Case
Insurance Marketing, Localizing Outreach	Drone Building for College Project Work	Tutor, Translator & Confidence Builder	Exploratory AI Use & Sense-Making	Boutique & Bridal Design
AI Intervention	AI Intervention	AI Intervention	AI Intervention	AI Intervention
Generates content, scripts, poster ideas; enables parallel creation of 5–6 variants	Step-by-step assembly guidance; software code & fixes; electronics explanations; real-time debugging through ChatGPT	Bilingual explanations (English/Odia); repeat questioning; step-wise teaching support	Uses ChatGPT, Gemini; asks follow-up questions; clarifies concepts; shapes exploration	Conversational design guidance; modifies drapes, fabric, colour suggestions
Post-AI Outcome	Post-AI Outcome	Post-AI Outcome	Post-AI Outcome	Post-AI Outcome
5–6 posters in 5 minutes; choice-based selling; reduced rework	Build completed in ~1 month; near-zero human dependency; confidence to work independently	Fear-free learning; clearer teaching; higher academic & communication confidence	Improved understanding; reduced hesitation; confidence in asking questions	Higher customization confidence; better client consultation; expanded creative range
AI Engines Activated	AI Engines Activated	AI Engines Activated	AI Engines Activated	AI Engines Activated
Productivity Engine; Skill Multiplier; Candidate Upgrader	Skill Factory; Permission Engine; Productivity Engine	Skill Factory; Permission Engine; Candidate Upgrader; Skill Multiplier	Search 2.0 Engine; Permission Engine	Skill Multiplier; Permission Engine; Job Engine
Use Case Demo	Use Case Demo	Use Case Demo	Use Case Demo	Use Case Demo
AI converts creative work from linear (redo) to parallel (choice), moving design as a bottleneck. From Rasta to Chalna	AI collapses institutional, multi-disciplinary learning into a single conversational workflow. From Rasta to Chalna	AI's most powerful role is emotional-cognitive scaffolding — safety and confidence to learn. The Permission Engine creating Agency	AI functions as a low-risk exploration space for youth. <i>The Hidden Job Engine</i>	AI plays a FabIndia-like role — amplifying existing craft into market-ready intelligence. <i>The Market Aligner at Work</i>

THE BHARAT BLUEPRINT FOR AI: HYPRLOCL INSIGHT FRAMEWORKS X JAN AI YOUGRAF SURVEY 2026

The big insight frameworks on India's rapidly emerging new rural reality are based on hyprrlocl's deep ethnographies with 12 AI role models across Raichur and Sirohi in January 2026. These have been validated at scale and pan-India by Jan AI's YouGRAF Survey, run during the same time period with 2,982 rural and semi-rural youth (ages 18-29).

1ST WAVE RURAL USER PROFILES

Four distinct leading-edge AI user profiles emerge from hyprrlocl's deep ethnographies—each distinguished by core motivations that drive them. Each of these motivations is substantiated by the YouGRAF Survey, particularly among pre-career youth who demonstrate the highest frequency of usage.

The Catalyst Effect: 55% of youth are 'Regular Users,' engaging with AI almost daily.	The Learning Leapfrog: AI is the new tutor; 63% find school/college answers on it, and 57% use it for exam prep.	The Creative Fuel: 23% employ AI for photo and caption editing to overcome creative and hardware limitations.	New Gen Women: AI is a critical educational and personal support for women who face greater social limitations; 66% use it for study help and 32% for personal mentorship.

AI REALITY CHECK: THE "PROGRESSIVE IDENTITY" SHIFT

AI's greatest value is dissolving the "Confidence Gap" for progress. Transforming the user's identity—from feeling stuck, held back, helpless—to progressing with pride and optimism!

The Progress Catapult: 46% awareness is anchored by language translation and 33% for social writing to 'measure up' and step up.	Judgment-Free Mentorship: 70% feel AI understands them; 28% chat 'like a friend' to fill the void of local advisors.	Personal Identification: 85% of rural youth feel AI is 'meant for people like them,' signaling a total identity shift in technology perception.

THE ADOPTION JOURNEY: TOWARDS PROGRESS, NOT JUST PRODUCTIVITY!

AI unlocks more than just productivity in the everyday lives of rural Indians—it bridges several last-mile gaps and hurdles that hold them back from their dreams of progress. However, it must overcome deep-rooted anxieties around safety (especially for women) and belonging to do this in rural settings, as validated by the YouGRAF Survey.

The Gateway Experience: 91% awareness is anchored by ChatGPT, fueled by the 'Wow' of fluent communication.	The Job Paradox: 77% believe AI helps job prep, yet 53% fear it will reduce opportunities.	The Safety Net: 42% worry about data misuse and 33% about persistent data storage, requiring 'Safety First' design.	The Legitimacy Mandate: 98% of youth seek government-certified AI courses to transform 'tinkering' into formal career capital.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSIVE AI

Scaling to the "Next Billion" requires solving for a "hierarchy of needs": access & literacy -> trust and security -> context and persona -> agency and culture. The YouGRAF Survey findings add further texture to this.

The New Literacy is Voice, Visual & Vernacular: 77% of youth survey participants currently type, but even among these leading-edge youth, 23% already use voice—one of the vital bridges for less-literate waves to come.	The Context Gap: 87% report AI often fails to fit local needs, reinforcing the demand for locally originated datasets and hyper-local intelligence.

THE OPPORTUNITIES ICEBERG FOR AI IN RURAL INDIA

Current usage is merely the "tip" of this iceberg—there is a massive latent appetite for AI to solve real-life infrastructural gaps across Social Development Goals in rural India.

Bureaucracy Bridge: 20% are already attempting to navigate government and online forms using AI.	Health Access: 18% use AI for medical queries, indicating a readiness for 'first conversation' health triage.	The Latent Demand: 22% specifically want AI built for real-life tasks like schemes, health, and farming.

“Google brought the world to the phone. AI turns it into MY world.”

In Summary

AI has been intuitively adopted by rural youth through jugaad-style (*simple workaround*) discovery. Its meaning deepens as users climb from study to skills to earning, with gendered routes and a strong AI-as-mentor signal where human guidance is scarce. At the same time, inhibition, limited imagination of what's possible, local mismatch, and fear of the unknown constrain how far youth are willing to stretch AI's power today.

- **Google was about finding. AI is about using.**
- **Google is passive, AI is active.**
- **Google is information, AI is engagement.**
- **Google ne raasta dikhaya, AI chalna sikhata hai. (*Google showed us the path, AI taught us how to walk through.*)**
- **Google ne duniya phone pe laayi, AI usey apni bana diya hai (*Google brought the world to the phone. AI turns it into my world.*)**



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